

Statement of
Dominic J. Liberatore
Executive Director
All Aboard Ohio

Before the
Subcommittee on Railroads
The Honorable Steven C. LaTourette, Chairman
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives

September 22, 2005

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Good morning. My name is Dominic Liberatore. I am Executive Director of All Aboard Ohio, formerly known as the Ohio Association of Railroad Passengers. I want to thank Chairman LaTourette, Ranking Member Brown and the other members of the subcommittee for having me here today. I also want to thank Chairman LaTourette for his efforts in advancing H.R. 1630 and H.R. 1631. All Aboard Ohio also strongly supports S.1516, the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act introduced by Senators Lott and Lautenberg and trusts that this Committee will continue to work closely with its Senate counterpart.

I am here on behalf of all Ohioans who ride, or wish to ride, passenger trains and to speak in support of these pieces of legislation.

Ohio and the nation needs a stable, cohesive and innovative national passenger rail system under Amtrak. But they have been unable to provide such service due to the lack of stable long-term funding and lack of a mandate to provide the kinds of service that meet the needs of Ohio. As the graphic on the monitor illustrates, Columbus is the second largest metropolitan statistical area in the United States with no passenger rail service. However, since Phoenix is served indirectly by Amtrak—albeit 35 miles away—Columbus is in effect first.

Some argue that privatization is the magical panacea to improving passenger rail. I am greatly concerned about these statements, especially in light of the service failures and incredible governmental expense incurred in Great Brittan.

Rather than privatize, I believe H.R. 1630 will provide stability; improve accountability; encourage better, more reliable service; allow Amtrak to develop new routes; purchase more modern equipment; and make badly-needed repairs to both existing equipment and infrastructure.

Ohio is one of 24 states that are now developing or implementing plans for regional passenger rail service with fast, frequent and timely trains in designated short-haul corridors. The Ohio Hub Plan calls for 6 to 8 trains in day, running at up to 110 miles per hour along corridors serving virtually every major city in Ohio and connecting them with major international airports and business hubs like Chicago, Detroit, Pittsburgh, Toronto and even New York, Philadelphia and Washington D.C. It would also greatly expand capacity and eliminate bottlenecks for the movement of freight by rail.

Preliminary economic impact figures indicate the Ohio Hub System, if built, will be a strong tool for developing new business, expanding existing business, creating more and better jobs and putting more dollars into local economies. Just building it would create over 6,000 construction jobs.

But even as the Hub advances through the planning process, it is impeded by the lack of a federal funding mechanism that would allow states and the federal government to partner in funding these plans. Please direct your attention to the monitors. When discussing transportation funding disparities, the former chairman of this subcommittee, Representative Jack Quinn said, "You get what you pay for." He could not have been more correct.

H.R. 1631, I believe, begins to answer this critical gap. It establishes the same 80%-20% federal to state funding match that other modes like highways and airports enjoy. This is absolutely necessary if we are to bring balance to our transportation system.

And I don't think I am exaggerating it to say this need is critical. Even now, as gasoline prices rise, highways become more crowded and many of our nation's airlines face financial uncertainty, Ohioans and all Americans are looking around for an option to driving or flying. But that option, too often, is either not there or too inconvenient in terms of time or location. It illustrates how our national transportation system is fundamentally unbalanced and a handicap to the mobility of all Americans.

Ironically, in spite of these limitations, Amtrak has seen a steady increase in ridership on all of its trains—both short and long-distance. State-supported train service in California, Washington State, Illinois and even Maine have seen ridership numbers increase to the point where funding to buy or lease more passenger cars is desperately needed.

Members of the Committee, H.R. 1630, 1631, and S.1516 will help Ohio and the rest of America get on track.

But I would also like to speak in support of amending H.R. 1631 to include a provision that allow states to claim credit for local and state dollars already being spent on rail and rail-related transportation projects as the state's share of future matching funds. Given that most state budgets are already strained, this provision would enable projects like the Ohio Hub to get rolling without having to go before the voters for new taxes.

Many speak of federal dollars spent on highways and aviation as "investment" while speaking of federal dollars spent on Amtrak as a "subsidy." H.R. 1630 and 1631 are not, as some would say, a subsidy.

It is no less an investment than what we have historically made for our highway and aviation systems. It is an investment that will bring more transportation choices, improve our economy and help create jobs by keeping business and industry moving. But improved passenger and freight rail will also improve our quality of life by reducing air pollution as well as our dependence on oil. It will also allow us to better manage and even reduce traffic congestion on our highways and airways. And finally, in balancing our national transportation system, it will actually make our nation more secure from the kind of natural or man-made catastrophes that can—and have—shut down other modes.

The members of All Aboard Ohio thank the subcommittee for its work to improve and invest in Amtrak. If there ever was a time to bring passenger rail to the forefront, now is that time. Thank you, and I will be glad to answer any questions.

Graphs on next page:

"Largest MSA's Without Amtrak Service"

"You Get What You Pay For"

Largest MSA's Without Amtrak

- Phoenix: 3,215,876 *
- Columbus: 1,612,694
- Las Vegas: 1,375,765
- Nashville: 1,311,789
- Louisville: 1,161,975

(* Phoenix area is served by a station in Maricopa, AZ, 35 miles south)

"You Get What You Pay For"

